

FAMILY SYSTEM AS A DETERMINANT OF FERTILITY IN TRADITIONAL KOREA*

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This study is concerned with the question whether the traditional family system of Korea has an inherent propensity for high fertility and thus constitutes an important barrier to the recent fertility transition in Korea. To answer the question, this paper examines fertility implications of the major principles and components of the traditional family system in various social, demographic and familial settings.

Introduction

In Korea, there has been, since the early 1970s, a rising concern shown in researching the impact of the family system upon fertility (e.g., Lee, H.Y., 1971; Chung et al., 1972; Kim & Shah, 1979; Kwon, 1982). As in the case of the earlier attempts to study this problem in other countries, such studies have tried to relate familial factors to the level of fertility without giving any attention to circumstantial factors involved in reproduction, and the outcome was rarely satisfactory. The major factors chosen to represent the important aspects of the traditional family system of Korea include the type of family composition, perceptual and behavioural commitments in the pivotal traditional family norms, and the husband's birth order among his brothers.

The major question here is how to interpret the outcomes of those studies. One interpretation might be that the family system is not a factor in reproduction. But social scientists rarely agree to such an idea; instead, they tend to blame the lack of clear relationship on the deficiency of data, conceptual frameworks, or methods. To accept the proposal that the family system has nothing to do with fertility is to repudiate, in effect, the very basic presupposition of social science that socially meaningful behaviour of individuals is influenced (or determined) by major social institutions and systems.

One of the most serious problems in such studies is found in the implicit assumption that individuals live in the same type of family structure throughout their life span. It is well known that the type of family people construct is subject to various social, demographic and economic conditions they encounter, and that it changes in accordance with the stage of family life cycle each individual belongs to. In a traditional society with strong extended family ideals, it is widely observed that many couples do not have any choice but to form a nuclear family because of the prevailing high mortality situations (Lee & Kwon, 1968: 13-16 & 28-31). Poor economic conditions of the family are often cited as a major barrier in traditional societies to prevent the prevalence of extended families (ibid: 9-11). Also one may start to live in an extended family after marriage, but has to constitute a nuclear family later because of the death of parents. In a word, the type of family each individual lives in is neither a static variable as most of the typical socio-economic variables like education and religion, nor a status indicator like occupation and income.

Also, the process of family building itself constitutes the major condition of family living and structure. It is undoubtedly true that the number of children affects not only

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economic conditions but housing and other living conditions of the family, and the constraint to form a nuclear family is thought to have been heightened with an increasing number of children in (traditionally) poor economic settings, although the society idealizes extended family living. In other words, the concept of unidirectional causal relationship between family system and fertility on an individual level is not valid. The two affect each other in an intermingling process.

It may be argued that the normative aspects of the family system are not much affected by circumstantial conditions of individuals, so that these norms can be rightly treated as major determinants of fertility for a given society. But how to define or delimit the important family norms is found to be problematic. It is often stated that some societies have extended family norms, or large family norms, implying that those norms explain the actual level of fertility in those societies. However, many studies confirm that such norms are too general or ideal to guide the actual reproductive behaviour of individuals. We can identify various specific or practical norms which have applications only to certain specific contexts. Many individual behaviours which do not confirm the general norms are justified by such specific contextual norms, and, in the case that the general norms are too ideal to accommodate the reality, the contextual norms are likely to govern most of the behaviour of individuals in the society. In other words, in a society where high fertility norms are idealized, low fertility can be achieved with the support of the practical norms under certain societal circumstances, without resulting in a serious normative conflict to the society.

These observations suggest that any attempt to construct simple causal relationships between family system and fertility level can not be easily justified. Family building behaviour and family structure are inseparable, and a variety of family norms play different roles in different socio-economic circumstances of individuals and society. In short, the relationship between the family and fertility can only be properly pursued in reference to specific family norms and the patterns of their functioning in varying conditions. This obviously requires viewing fertility not as a one-moment product which has been assumed by most studies on fertility determinants but as a process over a prolonged period of time, and to examine the reproductive behaviour of individuals while considering their societal contexts and specific conditions.

The traditional Korean family is organized in accordance with the patriarchal, patrilinear, and patrilocal principles (see Kim, D.H., 1980: 218-223 & 325-335). Considering that the family has been the primary unit of social organization and social interactions in traditional Korea, these principles of the family system should have constituted the very basic fabrics of the society. Consideration of the family exceeded in importance the interests of individuals, and individual behaviour was almost exclusively justified by the pivotal family norms which were represented by 'hyo' or filial piety. In the case of social and familial responsibilities being in severe conflict, the law postulated that one perform familial duties first. In short, the family has governed social as well as individual life and behaviour in traditional Korea. We may call such a tendency 'familism'.

The basic principles of the traditional Korean family system clearly indicate the important social characteristics of Korean society; that is, male supremacy or dominance in social life, an extended family ideal, authoritarian order of life, kin consciousness, and emphasis on family stability and solidarity. Strong son preference in contemporary Korea has undoubtedly originated from the traditional family system and familism. A large family ideal was supported by the traditional family norms. However, these simple facts appear to have given a rise to the careless assertion that the traditional family system of Korea has a high fertility propensity and thus is the most crucial hindrance to the current fertility transition toward a small family size.

Since the early 1960s fertility has declined substantially in Korea; but no major changes

in the family system have been observed. Probably it may be argued that the meaning of patriarchal and patrilocal principles has waned significantly in the urban family. It is observed, however, that fertility decline in rural Korea, where the traditional family system and norms are little affected, has been as much as that in urban areas. As mentioned above, fertility surveys have never confirmed the idea that the traditional family system and norms of Korea constitute factors enhancing the level of fertility under all circumstances. Then, how can we interpret such observations? For this, the essential step seems to be to examine the crucial functions of children in the traditional Korean family in relation to the major principles of the system.

Implications of Patriarchy

According to Caldwell (1976; 1978), patriarchy combined with an extended family ideal is a decisive factor enhancing fertility in any society. He contends that flows of family wealth in the patriarchal system are supportive of high fertility since the patriarch (male head of the family) has an uneven gain of wealth from wife and children. The patriarch has command over the rest of the family members and will direct having more children to accumulate more wealth for himself, Caldwell argues in reference to two African communities. Concerning Caldwell's theory, very extensive and comprehensive counter-arguments were given by Cain (1982). It seems unnecessary to repeat the same discussion here, so our discussion on the validity of his theory will be confined to the aspects particularly relevant to examining the implications of the traditional patriarchal system for the current fertility transition in Korea.

Apart from the question of how to measure the wealth flows among family members, it is readily apparent in traditional Korea that the patriarch did not have much economic gain from having many or more children. While many sons were favoured, only one son (mostly the eldest one) was responsible for the support of parents in old age. Other sons set up separate households with a small piece of land distributed by the parents unequally among sons, if the parents owned any. In traditional Korea, the majority of farmers were tenants and the concern widely prevailed among landholders that the division of land, which was facilitated mostly by having many sons, was a process of impoverization of the family. In addition, the custom of early marriage, which is regarded as having been an important institutional mechanism for high fertility in traditional Korea, should have scraped from the patriarch the most significant part of other economic gain he might expect from children. Unlike what is taught in the classical literature, the 'hyo', which is the cardinal norm supporting the extreme patriarchal system in Korean society, is found to have been conceived by most commoners as the ultimate economic independence of children so as to relieve the burden of the parents (Lee et al., 1968: 158-160). According to the literary concept, the 'hyo' is for children to provide parents with all kinds of benefits and privileges (see Ch'oi, 1966: 221-238), but it is alleged that such a concept of hyo rarely dominated in traditional Korea due mainly to the paucity of resources to achieve the ideal (Lee et al., op. cit.).

If a society has no constraint of land shortage and thus the net family income (or production) is dependent upon labor force available within the family, a strong patriarchal system would prompt the patriarch to have great economic and political gains from having many or more children. But in a society where the population pressure on land is severe, as in traditional Korea, many children would mean more hardship rather than benefit to the patriarch in the same family system because of his responsibility to raise children and support the family. As such, market condition for child labour may constitute a major boundary condition in the Caldwell's theory: If a society can provide a sizeable market for

child labour with returns greater than what is needed for bare survival of the working child, a larger family will naturally be sought for the family economy in a patriarchal system.

Another pitfall of the concept of family wealth flows among its members lies in the hidden assumption that the family is composed of individuals with conflicting interests and thus pursuing their own interests against those of other members. In most traditional societies, the assumption is not valid. In Korea, which can be characterized as a familistic society, the family rather than individuals was the basic unit for the interpretation of socially meaningful behaviour of individuals. Accordingly, a poor son with a rich father was not readily conceivable. In pursuing the relationship between the patriarchy and fertility in Korea, the more important question should be whether the system itself would contribute to building up more family wealth in the case of achieving a large family. No logical causal relationships can be provided in this regard.

In traditional societies, the economic need of the family may be thought to have been institutionalized into the system of the family. For example, extended and large family ideals are frequently justified by the family-unit economy and the function of the family as the major labour force supplier. But in this kind of conceptualization of the relationship between family system and fertility, no logical justification can be easily established for the idea either that a large family is beneficial for the family economy or that a large family size ideal is an inevitable outcome in a traditional economy. The nature of the relationship should not depend on the type of family, but on the economic conditions of the society in general. Various historical documents clearly disclose that the traditional Korean agriculture of the 17th through the 19th century suffered severely from overpopulation or over-supply of labour. In other words, the large family ideal of the time should not be taken as a response to the economic need for an average family or society as a whole. So far as the family economy is concerned, a large family has rarely been a necessary condition in traditional Korea at least since the 17th century. It may even be reasoned that extreme labour-intensive farming and strict division of labour by sex in farming, which effectively eliminated female labour in rice cultivation until recently, were the major institutional measures to solve the chronic problem of excess labour supply in traditional Korea. The division of labour by sex can be explained by social norms postulating strict sex segregation in all aspects of social life. However, Korean society has observed, in the 1970s, a rapidly growing female labour participation in farming without any social resistance, as a response to the male labour shortage due to a large exodus of rural population to urban centers (Lee, M.G., et.al., 1970: 31-32). It is also apparent, with the rapid industrialization since the 1960s, that many rural families have become better off owing to the help of children who are employed in urban industries. The economic help of children obviously signifies that the traditional family system and familism still strongly prevail; but the ideal family size has dwindled greatly since 1960 all over the country.

Implications of Patrilineage

Patrilineage is the most important component of the traditional family system in Korea. The strong emphasis on ancestor worship which requires the observance of 'jesa' (or memorial) rituals for fore-parents upto five generations upwards symbolizes the social significance of the continuation of the family through sons. Accordingly, the idea of family dissolution has been alien to Korea, despite the normative tolerance of marriage dissolution by a husband's desertion of his wife. In short, marriage did not mean the creation of a new family, but was an institution to secure the continuation of an ever-present family in traditional Korea. The extended family is usually thought to be the only mechanism to realize such an idea. In this vein, strong son preference and extended family

ideals should be regarded as the natural outcome of the traditional patrilineal family system of Korea.

The extended family in traditional Korea took a form of stem family in which the eldest son's family of procreation live with the parents. As a result, the continuation of family lineage through 'the first son' became the major concern of the Korean family. Other sons inherit the lineage too, but they are not allowed to constitute 'bon-ga' (or the main family) and have to start their own branch families. A middle-sized town survey in the mid 1960s discloses the prevalence of such practices in family formation, so far as the survey can trace back (back to the early 1940s) (Lee & Kwon, 1968). For example, in the case of parents surviving, the first (or eldest) sons were reported to have rarely formed an independent household on marriage and to have stayed with the parents until they died. Under the same situation, the majority of other sons started their own nuclear family upon marriage. Even those who did not form a separate family living at the beginning did so mostly within four years.

Another important character of the Korean patrilineage system is strong allegiance to the 'blood-tie', particularly in the male line. The continuation of lineage by adoption has been avoided. The problem of adoption was usually raised only when the couple or the family had to give up on all other measures, including the husband's taking concubines, to secure at least one son. The problem was felt to be particularly acute if it occurred in the main family since its male offspring was an absolute necessity for the uninterrupted ancestor worship rituals since the duty was not allowed, both by law and custom, to be transferred to any other person. In such a case, a child of the nearest blood tie, that is, in most cases, the eldest son of the husband's immediately younger brother, was adopted. In the upper Yangban (or Literati) class, adoption was more prevalent, for there was an additional concern for a child to continue the family line legally; that is, legitimacy by birth. According to the teachings of Chu-shi (a Confucian disciple) which were transformed into the family laws of Yi-dynasty Korea, the legitimacy of a birth could be conferred only to a child born to the legal wife, not to concubines (For the traditional adoption system, see Kim, D.H., 1980: 262-290; Lee, H.Y., 1978: 771-778). Although the need for adopting a son was more pressing in the Yangban class, the range of selection was narrower because the candidacy was limited to the legitimate sons of brothers.

From the discussions above, it is clear that the absolute importance of the continuation of family lineage and the related stem family ideology should have given a rise to the idea of the absolute necessity of the first (or one) son in traditional Korea. In reality as well, the preferential ordering of children has been in agreement exactly with the relative importance of children's position in the lineage system: The first son, was of absolute importance, other sons were of secondary importance, and daughters were regarded as temporary family members until they got married. The distance between the first son and other sons in emotional preference has been so pronounced that the first son's weight in the family was more than the sum of all other children, as well expressed in an old saying that ten (other) sons can not beat the first son.

The first-son preference has strongly prevailed in other Confucian societies as China and Japan. However, the heir of the family could be chosen among other sons and adopted sons by marriage to daughters in Japan. In other words, blood-tie and the siblings order could be neglected in traditional Japan, while the privilege of the heir in Japan was much greater than those in Korea and China. In Japan, the heir inherited all the economic and political rights of the family, whereas distribution of land and other properties among sons or children, though very unequal in terms of the child's birth order and sex, was institutionalized in Korea and China (Choi, 1966: 644-649).

Because of the strict allegiance to Chu-shi's Confucian teachings, the importance of the

first son and gender preference are known to have been much stronger in Korea than in China in both economic and emotional terms. In a comparative study of Tokugawa Japan and Ch'ing China, Nakamura and Miyamoto (1982) argue persuasively that the concern about keeping the family wealth, which was the outcome of the political and economic structures of the time, was the decisive factor in the lineage, inheritance, and power structure of the Japanese family which in turn was conducive to attitudes and behaviour leading to lower fertility in Japan than in China. They contend that the greater availability of land in China could partially cope with the partible inheritance of the family wealth among children and a continuous population increase. In relation to fertility, the focus is naturally on the relative position of the child heir (mostly the first son even in Japan) in the respective family systems and the economic conditions and structure of an average family.

J.S. Choi argues that the first son (or the heir) was more important economically in the traditional Japanese family, but much more favoured emotionally and socially in the Korean family (*ibid*). In general, preference for a particular son or child was stronger in Korea than in Japan. It is, however, noted that high fertility attitudes prevailed, unlike in Tokugawa Japan, even in the later half of Yi-dynasty Korea when impoverization of the family due to many sons was the crucial concern of most farmers. If people are primarily interested in the 'family wealth' and feel an economic burden with many children, it is natural to assume that strong preference toward the first son could provide a social rationale for small family ideas and behaviour. In traditional societies where no effective method of fertility control was available, the first son preference could induce negligence of the care of other children, thus resulting in a higher childhood mortality and less population growth in the society as a whole. In Japan some means to enhance childhood mortality such as infanticide were once institutionalized. In Korea, basic social and family norms for a large family had persisted even in the period of excessive population pressure on land; however, population decrease was the outcome in such a period, for example during 1750-1850, as the case of Tokugawa Japan. It is well documented that famine, diseases and social unrest were the major forces in population decline for selected periods in the Yi-dynasty (Kwon & Shin, 1977: 317-324). But it may not be so unreasonable to assume that the strong first-son preference facilitated negligence of the care of other children in such circumstances, having latently functioned to achieve a small number of surviving children in traditional Korea. The fact that the recent rapid transition of the family size value in Korea with the large availability of fertility control methods occurred with no serious social resistance can be interpreted indicating that the traditional family system in general and the first son preference in particular have the propensity to support low fertility in emergent societal conditions.

Implications of Patrilocality

The patrilocal residence rule is regarded as an effective mechanism to consolidate patriarchy and patrilineage in the traditional Korean family system. It helped to set up and maintain kinship villages all over the country, and consequently to foster a strong sense of kinship in the mind of Koreans. It was reported that more than half of the rural villages in Korea were dominated by one kind group (or clan) and many others by two or three kin groups (Lee, M.G., 1973: 4-8; Kim, D.H., 1980: 105-106). The first type of village is called 'same surname village' in contrast to 'mixed surname village'. Same surname villages are often associated with fame and pride, for such were usually possible in the past when the leading kin family had wealth and power to keep the village from being intruded by other kind families. Also, most of the so-called Yangban villages are known

to be same-surname villages. In other words, patrilocality was a traditional principle to define the social boundaries of the life of individuals, to dictate social class consciousness in everyday living, and to ensure the loyalty of individuals to the kinship or the family, particularly in the Yangban class.

An important element in the traditional family institution of Korea which has been closely associated with patrilocality is the principle of 'exogamy', which inhibits the marriage of two parties bearing the same surname and the same family origin (or 'bon'). This is generally considered to have been an effective mechanism to control the hierarchy of kin members by preventing any hierarchical confusion due to the marriage of kin with different hierarchical positions in the kinship. In a kin village, exogamy necessitates the change of residential village of at least one party of the couple when marriage occurs. The change of woman's residence was postulated by the traditional family system in Korea. It was also customary in Korea to avoid wedding among the people living in the same village even though the two parties involved have different surnames and don't have any kind of kinship relations. In short, the application of the idea of exogamy was extended to include the residential concept of boundary: The norms and practices which prevailed in same-surname villages were applied to mixed-surname villages because of the social superiority of the former to the latter.

As such, the patrilocal system of Korea succeeded in segregating married women from their own family. In addition to the physical distance of separation, it became an important family norm that a woman should sever all emotional as well as economic ties with her maiden family and be loyal only to the family and kinship of the husband. As a result, on wedding, a woman began to be subjected to various kinds of severe pressure from the husband's family of orientation and kinship. A collective pressure on childbearing was one of them. It may be questioned, however, whether the pressure on childbearing was for high fertility. According to the traditional kinship ideology, particularly in the Yangban class, rapid multiplication of kin members was thought to represent the power of the kinship. However, such an idea seems to have prevailed not because a larger family was economically beneficial but because economically better-off families could achieve larger *actual* families for they could provide better care to the babies and thus prevent extra deaths of children due to poverty and famine.

Some recent surveys reveal that most women who achieved somewhat minimum fertility or those who had at least one son recall no fertility pressure of any sort from the family of orientation or kinship of the husband (e.g., in -depth interview records of Ichon Survey, 1965 and Ichon Resurvey, 1974, PDSC, SNU.). The surveys clearly indicate that the kinship intervention in the reproductive behaviour of the couple was rather indirect and minor except for the case of no sons or no child, even in the traditional social settings. Since a deliberate attempt to have no child or a very small family was extremely rare in traditional Korea where no effective method of fertility control was known to be available, fertility pressure, however, strong it was, should have little to do with enhancing the level of fertility of individual women. Therefore, the pressure often led the woman to withhold part of her rights as wife by allowing to the husband a concubine or a contract wife to gain a son of his blood line; instead, she reserved the right to raise the child gained in such a way. Sometimes the pressure came in a relatively early stage of marriage, or at a relatively young reproductive age, and thus acted as a factor curbing the fertility of such women significantly. In other words, the pressure was designed to raise the fertility of the husband, not of the wife, and consequently often resulted in a discrepancy in fertility between the couple. Also, the societal level of fertility is not thought to have been affected much by the intensive involvement of the family and kinship in the couple's childbearing behaviour, though its impacts on fertility performance of the individuals concerned were

diverse according to their social status and family conditions.

The distinction of fertility between husband and wife is of great importance in a polygamous society. But on a societal level, there is no convincing evidence so far that fertility differs in terms of whether the society adopts monogamy or polygamy (Nag, 1968: 92-97). The traditional Korean society was basically a monogamous society: There was only one legal wife by law. Concubinage was accepted, but the status of concubines and their children was greatly inferior to that of their counterpart, and this very social discrimination prevented a girl from an ordinary (or decent) family from being a concubine. So most concubines had previously been bar girls (or prostitutes), whose fecundity was likely to have been impaired already. According to in-depth interviews with legal wives with no child or no son in some surveys, the majority of concubines failed to produce a child for their family, too (PDSC, op. cit.). This might have been caused largely by the husband's infecundity, but should be accounted for, in part, by in- or sub-fecundity of concubines. (In the case of no child, infecundity of the husband was never questioned and the blame was laid onto the wife in traditional Korea.)

From the above discussions, we may tentatively conclude that the traditional family system of Korea does not necessarily support high fertility, but has many important elements which can promote low fertility under certain social conditions. Now, let us turn our attention to the major elements of the traditional Korean family system which are usually referred to as having a high fertility propensity and thus constituting a major hindrance to a rapid reduction of fertility in Korea, to examine, in more detail, the implications of the family system for both the reproductive behaviour of individuals and the societal level of fertility. The elements include the social and familial functions of children, preferential hierarchy among children, the status of women, and the major family size norms.

Functions of Children

In examining the fertility implications of a family system, it is useful to distinguish the functions of children in the family to fulfill the needs stemming from the family system from those to deal with other needs arising from the overall social, economic and environmental conditions. The distinction has rarely been stressed in research on the relationship between fertility and the family, due largely to the popularly held implicit assumption that the family is the most basic institution and performs most important societal functions in traditional societies. The assumption is unquestionably valid, but appears often to mislead one to another assumption that virtually all the activities performed as a family member fulfill the crucial needs of the family system. For instance, the family is the primary institution responsible for labour supply in a traditional society, but this does not necessarily mean that the traditional family system is geared to meet a specific need for a large or small supply of labour. We may well suppose that, even in a traditional society, the state of a certain type of social or economic need changes without any changes in the system which is to meet the need: In other words, a system is designed to meet particular *types* of need, not *certain specified states* of particular needs. Applying this argument to the family system and fertility, it is perfectly right to mention that one of the major social functions of a traditional family institution, say the traditional Korean family system, is the reproduction of population, but it may well be wrong to translate it into the assertion that the system has an inner property to support *high* or *low* fertility. Any family system would be flexible in adjusting itself to changing states of the societal need for population reproduction within a range set by the major elements of the family and marriage system. Accordingly, we may conclude that a family system has a high fertility propensity only if

the minimum fertility supported by the system under the exogenous conditions favouring a very low level of fertility can be still put into a high fertility category.

In view of the above arguments, the traditional Korean family system is not likely to be considered to necessarily support high fertility. It has been suggested earlier that the major familial functions of children in the Korean family were succession of the lineage, observance of ancestor worship rituals, and economic as well as emotional support of parents, particularly in old age. However, the first son was the only one who bore all these responsibilities. Other sons performed marginal or secondary familial functions. The most important among them was the security against the loss of the first son. Daughters were to play even less crucial functions in this regard. Such a functional discrimination of sons and daughters has been confirmed clearly by many recent surveys on fertility and family planning in Korea (e.g., Lee & Kim, 1979: 24-27). It has been revealed that the majority of the respondents attributed the importance of sons to the above-mentioned familial duties, while that of daughters to their being close and sympathetic to their mother or to their bringing a soft atmosphere to the family. Discrimination in the familial rights among children in accordance with that of the familial duties also trivialized the importance of children other than the first son in the traditional Korean family. The living quarters and properties kept for ancestor worship were inherited solely by the first son; land and other economic properties were usually distributed unevenly among sons (the share of the first son was usually two to five times greater than that of another son depending on the number of sons); for daughters, some gifts were given when they got married. One other thing to be noted in the inheritance system is that all sons were benefited if there was a smaller number of sons. So, unlike the desire of the parents, sons in rich families would have wanted fewer brothers. On the other hand, poor families in the traditional rural villages had often no land and properties to inherit except the living quarters, which were left to the first son. These familial customs are not believed to be conducive to high fertility in every societal circumstance; on the contrary, these would become important elements inducing very low fertility if such societal necessity prevails. It may be remembered here that the traditional high fertility in Korea during the 17th through the 19 century was not high enough to keep the level of net reproduction over 1, and the traditional family system had survived without much strain. This clearly indicates that the basic functions of children as stipulated by the traditional Korean family system can be satisfied with the net reproduction rate close to 1. In other words, the system will permit low fertility if the level of mortality reaches a low point.

Order of Son and Family Type

Apart from its implications for the societal level of fertility, the first son preference or the absolute emphasis on at least one son in the Korean family can be regarded to be a factor differentiating the reproductive behaviour of individual couples depending on the birth order of the husband among his brothers. If the husband is the only son to his family of orientation, of utmost familial concern to the couple (or his family) would be the possible discontinuation of the lineage. Similar concern can be assumed to be held by the first son, but to a lesser degree due to the greater possibility of finding an alternative, that is, the adoption of one of his brothers' sons. Various anthropological observations confirm such a speculation (e.g., PDSC, *op. cit.*, & 1975-76).

In a family with few offspring, especially a family with one son for two or more successive generations, the psychological pressure for a large family was particularly paramount. In such families, if a woman failed to produce a son in two or three years

after wedding, she became subject to intense pressure from other family members or close kin to take action to secure a son as heir of the family. The most common measure in this regard was to allow the husband to have a concubine. On the other hand, if she succeeded in producing a son or two, her position in the family was consolidated and she was relatively well treated by the family. It was the most harsh curse to a woman in traditional Korea to say that she would sever the lineage of the 'precious family'. In short, the status of women in the only-son families was very precarious and accordingly the parents of girls at marriageable ages were very reluctant to send their daughters to such families.

On the other hand, the first son with brothers was favoured as a spouse, since his relative economic advantage over the other brothers and additional social prestige given to the first son in the Yangban class outweighed his familial obligations in traditional Korea. In rural areas, it was often heard that a woman complained about her husband's being not the first son so that they had to suffer economic hardship. The situation was reversed in industrial urban areas. In a newly emerging urban setting, the advantage of the first son in the rural economy and the accompanying social status were trivialized; instead, the relative economic and social disadvantage of the first son was magnified. The result was unpopularity of the first son as a groom. The first son has the obligation to live with the parents if they want and this very fact is regarded to be the most important disadvantage of the first son in marriage. It is well known in Korea that there has been severe conflict between mother and daughter-in-law in the case of them living under the same roof, and that this is considered to have been the worst suffering for the daughter-in-law to bear. There has been no particular economic advantage for the first son in the newly emerging Korean urban setting. With rapid industrialization and economic growth, more economic opportunity has been open to the children's generation than that of the parents. Also, for poor urban families, to take care of the parents means an addition to the already existing economic hardship.

The above discussions certainly lead us to conclude that high fertility pressure has been greater in the order of the only son, the first son, and the other sons in the traditional Korean family. This, in turn, would have resulted in fertility differences by the order of husband among his brothers if effective methods of fertility control were available. However, no such differentials have been empirically confirmed in Korea. Three alternate, but very closely related, explanations can be attributed to this.

The first is that the only effective fertility pressure from the parents and other relatives was for 'one son' regardless of the husband's birth status. The second reason might be related to the actual size of household and its constraint on everyday living of the family. It can be easily shown that the only or first sons have had a much greater probability of living in an extended family and in a larger household than the other sons. However, the extended family and the compounded household appear not to be prone particularly to high (or higher) fertility. As discussed presently, the living conditions for the majority of Korean families were very poor, and accordingly co-residence with the parents or other relatives acted as a direct intervention in the husband-wife relationship. In a large extended family, a young married woman was usually occupied and exhausted with all the household duties everyday and was under the constant surveillance of the mother-in-law. Such are known to have often made the woman to abhor sex and pregnancy. In other words, the physical environments of the extended family or the compounded household is thought to have favoured lower fertility rather than that of the nuclear family in traditional Korea. Thirdly, in a poverty-stricken farming society, a large family, which the first or only sons was more likely to form, may be a factor prompting a low fertility attitude since a children can

easily be regarded as an additional source of hardship. After having met the most basic obligation of childbearing, the couple would have given up the idea of having additional children in such an economically desperate situation. In this case, the first-son preference would play a crucial role.

Women in an Extended Family

In traditional Korea, women's status in community as well as in the family was determined primarily by their fulfilment of the reproductive function, particularly the producing of sons, and this is generally interpreted to have been the major institutional mechanism for high fertility. Since women were deprived of any relationship with their maiden families after marriage, whether it was economical or emotional, they had to earn their own security through the acceptance and approval of their behaviour and performance by the husband's family and his communal relatives. This situation is well reflected in an old folk saying that, if a woman once married, she should then become a ghost of that (the husband's) family (meaning that she should "haunt" the family). The exogamous principle in mate selection and the patrilocal residential principle are thought to have been the major supporters of such a practice. Accordingly, *obedience* became the cardinal virtue for women in any circumstance. So, there developed an idea, "Women with stubbornness (or determination) will face an ill fate", meaning that such a woman may easily be deserted by the husband or his family and is most likely to live in all kinds of trouble.

According to the traditional law and custom, women could be expelled at virtually any time by the husband and his parents. In the seven cardinal misconducts of wives to be deserted included are disobedience to the parents-in-law, talkativeness and bad temper. Furthermore, they could not return to their maiden families after being deserted because it was an utmost disgrace to those families. In other words, women in traditional Korea were highly susceptible to the pressure or desire of the husband's family of orientation regardless of her own desire. In view of the fact that this pressure was justified mostly by ideal family norms while disregarding the actual circumstances, this can be interpreted to indicate that women's inferior social and family status might have easily been conducive to behaviour enhancing fertility to a level much higher than what women personally desired. However, as mentioned above, such pressing circumstances of the kinship and family for a higher fertility were usually accompanied by many leveraging forces dominating the actual fertility behaviour of the couple. For example, the presence of parents-in-law, particularly mother-in-law, was often reported as an important disrupting factor in the husband-wife relationship.

It was recalled by many women, according to several surveys with in-depth interviews (e.g., PDSC, op. cit.), that their marriage life was severely interfered with by the mother-in-law, so that there developed an anxiety about bedding with the husband and they tried to avoid sex as much as possible. Sometimes, this led the husband to indulge in extra-marital affairs with women serving in the bar (a kind of prostitution). Since the mother-in-law had the absolute dominance over her daughter-in-law and the women's world was almost completely segregated from the men's, even within the family, there was virtually no escape for a woman from the total control of the mother-in-law if the two lived under the same roof. The major overt concern of the mother-in-law in the husband-wife relationship was that excessive sex would impair the health of her son, and this provided a normative rationale for her positive interference in the sex relations of her son and daughter-in-law. The son couldn't protest to his mother, because it would only add hardship to his wife and thus more strain to their relationship, and he

shouldn't because the norm of 'hyo' prohibits such a protest to parents. In addition, sex was customarily defined as *dirty* and even talking of it was regarded improper in decent families, particularly for women. It is well known that such interference was extreme when the mother-in-law was widowed and dependent entirely on her son.

Housing conditions and patterns are also found to have been an important regulator of the reproductive behaviour of Koreans. In traditional settings, the majority of people lived in poverty and poor housing conditions. No secrecy could be kept in the house as rooms were so close each other and even a whisper could travel from one room to another because of poor sound control devices. Furthermore, a large family often used only one room during the winter to save heat. In many cases, a newly married couple shared a room with the widowed mother of the husband reluctantly because she insisted (*ibid*).

To sum up, the basic nature of the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship in everyday living should have functioned to lower the level of fertility to a substantial degree in traditional Korea, unlike what was expected from the pure normative structure of the family. Considering the lack of direct means to raise fertility, the high fertility pressure from the parents-in-law would have less significance in determining fertility than the situational factors regulating interactions among family members in everyday living in the traditional social settings of Korea. In the same light, we may surmise again that the extended family has no higher fertility propensity than the nuclear family. The majority of women who had once lived in the extended family after marriage, particularly with the mother-in-law, were reported to have begun to feel comfortable with the husband and thus to know about sex only after achieving separate living through either independence from the parents-in-law or their deaths (*ibid*). In this sense, if we only count the conditions of 'supply' of children, ignoring those of 'demand', so called modernization, including the adoption of the nuclear family ideal, and economic development can be regarded as fertility boosters as Moni Nag has observed (1980).

Practical Norms of Family Size

Some of the practical norms and culturally accepted justifications concerning various levels of reproductive performance of the couple in traditional Korea can be found in widely prevailing old folk sayings. As are shown below, some support high fertility, but others mitigate the pressure of high fertility providing justification for a small number of, or no, children. They are:

Sayings supporting high fertility

1. Many sons are one of the five greatest blessings.
2. Children are born with food to feed themselves.
3. If there are many children, you have a higher probability to have one who will succeed in the world.

Those discouraging high fertility

4. In a tree with many children, there is no time for the wind to die down.
5. It is no use to produce many, the important is to raise well even though there is only one.
6. Ten other sons can not beat the first son.

Those consoling the family with no child or no son

7. No child is the best fortune. (Sometimes this is used when children cause troubles to the parents.)
8. To have children is also a fate out of control.

Others

9. Neighbours are better than kin living far away.
10. Daughters are the only ones who understand mother.
11. Daughters become unrelated others after marriage.
12. Sons-in-law are guests for good.

Among those sayings, some items (1, 6, 11 and 12) are regarded to have stemmed from the traditional family system of Korea, but their fertility implications contradict each other. Others are related to the living conditions, especially economic difficulties. The above sayings clearly indicate that there had been consistent economic pressure for low or lower fertility in traditional Korea. Some argue that many sons are considered as one of the greatest blessings (item 1) and this would have had a more pronounced effect on fertility than the other adages. But examining closely the order of those blessings, the item for many children comes behind 'long life' and 'wealth'. In other words, major hazards in life in traditional societies, that is, diseases and poverty, were more important concerns of Koreans than the mere number of sons and children. It is also apparent from the above sayings that one major reason why many children was thought as a blessing was the hope that one of them would be able to help the family build wealth and fame, as expressed in item 3. Even item 2, which is usually considered as supporting high fertility, can be reasonably assumed to have originated to repeal the small family inclination of people due to poverty.

It is also found in some cases that two contradictory meanings were assigned to the same element so far as its implication for fertility is concerned. The items 3 and 5 are examples of this. The difference in expressions concerning the meaning of many sons appears to be contextual. The first was said with no responsibility on the part of the speaker and in a vague manner, while the second clearly spelled out the best means to achieve the hidden goal, that is, to bring the family to wealth and fame through the success of a son. When the meaning for family size on family wealth is mentioned vaguely, the high fertility aspect stands out, but when practicality is considered, the low fertility implication emerges. All these are enough to suggest that the traditional family system of Korea did not presuppose a particular type of family size orientation, and accordingly, individual variations in this regard could be justified by contingent situational norms. Many surveys confirm that such basic social norms as the prohibition of women's remarriage and desertion of husband by wife are observed to have been frequently violated without any social outcry even in rural kinship communities, since these were considered the best or wisest solution for those involved *under the circumstances* (e.g., PDSC, op. cit.). Even in a society rigidly bound by normative rules, such a situational tolerance is widely observed.

Although strong kinship ideology prevailed among all sectors of traditional Korean society, kinship obligations seem to have been highly limited in the case of the commoners: Economic obligations were minimal, and because most kinship-wide activities were related to ancestor worship rituals, which had more or less a symbolic meaning to demonstrate the social status of the kinship and the participants, such kinship obligations were more important to the Yangban class. Item 9 in the list of adages indicates

this very fact that kinship had little importance in everyday living, which is believed to have been more eminently related with fertility than the symbolic and ideological orientations in traditional Korea were, as repeatedly mentioned above. On the other hand, the items 11 and 12 confirm the earlier discussions of the concept of family and the importance of patrilineage in Korea. These sayings clearly convey the idea of how the family membership was defined in terms of sex, blood-tie and marital status. In an extreme familistic society like traditional Korea, such a narrow definition of family membership may be a crucial factor determining the minimum level of fertility of the society, but can not necessarily be a factor resulting in high fertility on a societal level.

Summary and Conclusions

From the above discussion, we can not conclude that the traditional Korean family system has an inherent high fertility propensity. Neither the basic principles nor the important elements of the system are found to support high fertility necessarily: Rather their implications for family size are observed to be diverse and circumstantial.

There is no convincing evidence that patriarchy solicited a large family ideal in traditional Korea since a large family was the major mechanism to establish family wealth and thus to strengthen the power and authority of the patriarch in the community as well as in the family. On the contrary, history discloses that under the severe economic difficulty due mainly to population pressure on land, a large family was often interpreted as a crucial factor impoverishing the family and thus weakening the power of the patriarch in Korea.

Patrilineage was associated with extended family ideals and son preference. But the extended family ideals in traditional Korea encouraged and were organized into the stem family which idealized the continuation of the family through successive first sons. The meaning of the first son was absolute and he carried almost every familial responsibility and right. The major value of other sons was that of security against the loss of the first son. If the security value diminishes, as in modern industrial societies, the value of sons other than the first one should reduce concomitantly. It could also be argued that extreme one child preference would be an underlying factor in low fertility in a poor agricultural economy. Strong adherence to blood-ties in the succession of the lineage can be viewed to have a high fertility implication. But adoption of a son from a close kin family could be easily arranged even in the traditional settings, so that the impact of the highly regulated adoption practices due to the emphasis on blood-ties on the societal level of fertility is not considered to have been significant.

If kinship solidarity was a determinant of the societal level of fertility, patrilocality in the Korean family system, coupled with the exogamous marital norms, should have been a major mechanism to boost fertility in the past. However, various social and fertility surveys have so far failed to produce any decisive evidence that strong kinship solidarity promoted a large family ideal and built pressure for high fertility on the kinship members. The major concern of the Korean kinship was not the sheer size but the fame of the kin group, which was usually measured in terms of wealth and success in the world achieved by one or few kin members. Often such a pursuit of kinship glory seems to have been an incentive for the quest of a large family, as being reflected in the adage that if you have many sons, you have more chance to have a successful son. It is however apparent that the saying was more frequently used in a circumstance to seek apology for too many children or to console those having difficulties because of too many kids. Probably, the kinship community would have lessened the dependency of farming on family labour since the effective management of community labour was

possible through a powerful kinship mechanism. In other words, strong kinship solidarity in everyday living would be a factor reducing the economic value of children to some extent. It is however uncertain whether kinship solidarity has prompted 'cooperation' and 'corporation' among kin members in traditional Korean villages. Research findings in this regard conflict with each other (Brandt, 1971: 10-11), suggesting no significant relationship between kinship and the demand for family labour.

The ideal type of family portrayed by the traditional family system of Korea is an extended family in which many generation are living together under the same roof. In reality, such an ideal could be achieved by only a limited portion of the population due mainly to the prevalence of high mortality and poverty. Accordingly, the majority of the population lived in a nuclear type of family with extended family ideology in traditional Korea. It is often argued that a couple in their reproductive ages are more subject to fertility pressure from their parents in an extended family. However, the pressure has not been proven to have been a significant determinant of fertility. Rather, the living conditions of the average extended family are known to have frequently generated a low fertility attitude in young women. In an extended family, they were deprived of privacy and the husband-wife relationships were often severely interfered in by the husband's mother. Bad housing conditions constituted an additional source of strain in the husband-wife relationship.

Unlike what is usually argued, the norms concerning the family size and the status of children are not found to have indiscriminately supported high fertility in traditional Korea. Some norms favour high fertility, but others console low fertility or infecund couples. In general, the norms with high fertility implications appear to have had usage when the reference was vague or an idealized setting, while those with low fertility implications had specific applications.

In a word, it is not valid at all to assume that the prevalence of high fertility in traditional Korea itself is a proof that the traditional family system of Korea supported large family ideals. The presence of high fertility elements in a family system does not necessarily mean that the system has no low fertility elements. Which set of elements governs the reproductive behaviour of individuals should be dictated by societal necessity as well as by the desires of the individuals at that time.

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